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ABSTRACT

Project STRIDE was conducted at Keys Community Center in Phoenix, Arizona, to create job linkages and prepare local people for jobs in distressed areas through relationships among residents, employers, and service providers. The project's components include a community jobs team, group employability training, goal-setting, computer training, job seeking and retention skills, linkages with area employers, case management, and follow-up. On-the-job training with a major manufacturer was used at the beginning of the project, but was discontinued. An evaluation of the project after 16 months was conducted through interviews and discussions with staff, instructors, and participants, observations, and reviews of program records. During the 16 months (August 1997-December 1998), the project received 213 inquiries and performed 157 educational assessments; 107 people started training, 77 graduated, 51 began jobs and 7 more went on to more training or education; 19 were not working or unknown. As of January 1999, the wages of all workers ranged from $5.50 to $12.60 per hour, with an average of $7.70 per hour. STRIDE's program costs were $2,596 for completers; $3,920 for those who began work; and $4,876 for those who remained in jobs, school, or training through December 1998. Project participants had positive feelings about Project STRIDE at the end of training and at the 120-day retention mark. Recommendations include developing a vision and plan for Keys Community Center and STRIDE, staff development, continuing technical assistance from practitioners in training and development, long-term follow-up, and increasing staff to allow for a growing caseload. (KC)

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Morrison Institute for Public Policy
School of Public Affairs ■ College of Public Programs
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Project STRIDE:

Welcome Revivals

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Submitted to
City of Phoenix Community and Economic Development
and
Keys Community Center

March 1999

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Project STRIDE: Welcome Revivals

Stories from Project STRIDE

Larry beamed as he described the first job interview of his life. He said that he felt positive about how he had done in spite of being nervous. In fact, Larry was already scheduled for a second interview at the same firm. He credited Project STRIDE with giving him the skills and confidence to get himself back on track.

Denise said STRIDE helped her refocus on her goals and plans before she opened her neighborhood hair salon. She is also grateful for STRIDE's referral to the City of Phoenix's small business development program. The experience made her plan for the future more realistic.

Hadco, the first company to work with Keys Community Center on Project STRIDE, has gained 12 employees thus far at its manufacturing facility at 36th and Atlanta Streets. At the time of this report, four people had worked there for more than a year.

Job Linkages Demonstration RFP "Full Service" Project

- Community Jobs Team with residents, employers, and service organizations
- On-the-job training with EC employers
- Case management
- Employability training with assessment and basic skills training
- Job placement for those not in on-the-job training
- Followup and retention
- Career planning
- Support services
- One year of funding, paid out according to

Project STRIDE has been the source of many personal success stories since it began at Keys Community Center in August 1997. For a neighborhood where prosperity and progress have been in short supply for decades, these stories provide reason enough to keep Project STRIDE in business. But looking deeper, what have this demonstration program's results been for individuals, Keys Community Center and its partners, and the community?

This report describes Project STRIDE's activities and development over an approximately 16-month demonstration period and offers recommendations for the future. Information was gathered through interviews and discussions with staff, instructors, and participants, observations, and reviews of various program records. This is the second and final evaluation report on Project STRIDE. The first report appeared in June 1998. See Appendix A for details on methodology.

Project STRIDE was funded through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process that the City of Phoenix sponsored as part of its Enterprise Community (EC) program. Known as "job linkages," the initiative grew out of research by the EC Job Linkages Subcommittee and staff from the Phoenix Community and Economic Development Department. A strategy of preparing "local people for local jobs" made sense for the EC because of the area's substantial employment base and need for workers, and a large pool of potential employees. The EC's leaders accepted the

challenge of connecting these two significant resources.

Job linkages is based on expanding employment in distressed communities through relationships among residents, employers, and service providers. Localized, small-scale, individualized services were conceptualized as part of a "continuum" that would prepare participants to begin working at a level reasonable for their current skills and experience and then help them move to better and better jobs. The desire to help people move from "quality jobs" to stable careers put a premium on job retention and long-term relationships and on "a community support network for employment." City funding for Project STRIDE began in August 1997 and ended in December 1998. Southwest Leadership Foundation—Keys Community Center's parent organization—is currently funding Project STRIDE and seeking ongoing support for the program.

The City of Phoenix contracted with Morrison Institute for Public Policy (School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University) to evaluate the demonstration project and to provide input on whether the job linkages strategy should be expanded to other areas. In addition, a member of the city's Workforce Development Division of the Community and Economic Development Department monitored Project STRIDE and served as a liaison between the program and city government.

Project Stride's Development

Before Project STRIDE, Keys Community Center had had a variety of employment and education services. For example, a Kellogg Foundation grant had helped to support local students in higher education. The center also had worked with South Mountain Community College to provide tutoring for neighborhood residents, with Arizona State University's Career Outreach for vocational assessments, and with the Arizona Department of Education for adult education. Some JOBS (the state welfare-to-work program) clients also had received help at Keys.

However, at the time of the application, the agency was not operating a "full-service" employment program. Specifically, the center provided adult education and literacy services, and had a computer lab available to the public. Staff provided some limited employment referrals, and a clothing bank and emergency food aid were available. A child care center was in the planning stages. Keys employed a full-time director and contracted with other staff and consultants as necessary. The center's advisory board, which met only occasionally, included some Southwest Leadership Foundation staff and board members, local clergy, a representative of the University of

Project STRIDE's Contractual Requirements

These included the RFP requirements and the numbers and activities proposed by Keys Community Center and its Community Jobs Team.

- Recruit 80 EC residents for Project STRIDE
- Assess at least 40 EC residents academic skills
- Develop career ladders with at least 40 EC residents
- Address at least 40 EC residents' barriers to employment
- Train at least 40 EC residents in employability skills
- Assist 3 EC residents to become certified as cosmetologists and obtain employment at 20% above minimum wage for at least 120 days
- Assist 1 EC resident to become certified as a goal management facilitator and obtain employment at 20% above minimum wage for at least 120 days
- Assist 9 EC residents to obtain employment at

Arizona Cooperative Extension Service, and an ASU education professor. As reported previously, several of those interviewed said the job linkages project came at a good time for Keys since the agency had been looking for ways to go beyond its established services.

Original Executive Committee Membership

- Integrity Systems, Inc.
- Keys Community Center
- University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service

Morrison Institute's initial evaluation report likened Project STRIDE to a new business. At the beginning of the program, STRIDE's leaders were coping with the same start-up challenges faced by many new business owners. Keys anticipated hiring a case manager for the program, but began the contract without any dedicated program staff. Although the partner providers, such as the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service and Integrity Systems, Inc., had long-established curricula, a coherent STRIDE "course" did not exist. Essentially, Keys' executive director, partner providers, and the remaining volunteer members of the Community Jobs Team had to create everything from outreach materials to training schedules to participant forms from scratch. The program's needs soon threatened to overwhelm those (like the executive director and the facilitation consultant) who were squeezing Project STRIDE into "spare" time in their current jobs, and the volunteers who were helping in addition to managing their own businesses and organizations. An Executive Committee, comprised of the Keys executive director and several other partners, was designated to develop and oversee the program, and a case manager was hired to assist the director.

Staff changes in the first half of 1998, including the resignations of the case manager and the executive director and the hiring of a new executive, who also serves as vice president for operations at Southwest Leadership Foundation, brought Project STRIDE and Keys Community Center through the start-up phase. A part-time STRIDE project coordinator began in February 1998 and a new full-time case manager in March 1998. The new staff members brought significant, relevant qualifications to Keys, although they lacked specific experience in employment programs. This staff team, plus the Executive Committee, turned its attention to refining services and improving administrative processes.

Motivated to Learn and Change

Together the staff team and the most involved partners made it possible for STRIDE to move ahead. However, by the time dedicated program staff and better systems were in place, Project STRIDE, which was funded for only one year, lagged in terms of placements and job retention. Because the program received a specified amount of money as individuals finished training, began work, and stayed on the job for at least 120 days, the agency's financial situation was affected by the small number of participants. The need for "numbers" put substantial pressure on everyone connected with the program. The positive aspect of this stress was that it forced the organization to learn rapidly, to seek out information and assistance, and to reflect continually on the people in the program and the delivery of services. Expectations for participants were reexamined regularly. The staff and Executive Committee moved quickly to change aspects of the program that were not productive. As one staff person said, "If it doesn't work today, we'll change it tomorrow."

Program Components

Now, as at the beginning of the demonstration, Project STRIDE's components include a Community Jobs Team, group employability training, goal-setting, computer training, job seeking and retention skills, linkages with EC-area employers, case management, and followup. On-the-job training as described in the RFP was used at the beginning of the project in the major manufacturing employer, but was discontinued. The training subsidy did not appear to be perceived as necessary by other employers. A merger and other changes at the manufacturer also resulted in hires without the on-the-job training funds. The City of Phoenix approved this and other changes in the program's day-to-day operations. Instruction continues to be primarily through partnerships and contracts with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service, Arizona State University Career Outreach, Integrity Systems, Inc., and South Mountain Community College. Case management still plays a critical role in participants' experiences. However as shown in Table 1, the program's content and delivery methods evolved significantly during the demonstration period and continue to do so now. Overall, expectations for participants increased, and recruitment, assessment, instruction, and job referral became "tighter," more specific, and more focused on personal responsibility. The STRIDE training is now divided into the following areas: The World of Work; Me, the Worker; Job Getting Skills; and Job Keeping Skills, and includes 100 hours of training.

Under the four main headings listed above, STRIDE's training features:

- Managing Goal Achievement—personal development and goal-setting
- UA Extension Connection—nutrition, self-esteem, budgeting, conflict resolution, team building
- Job Readiness—tours of employers' facilities, personal job readiness and job match, employer presentations/active job search
- Computer training—introductory training in keyboarding plus Windows, Word, Excel, and Internet
- Job retention—community resources

STRIDE's emphasis is clearly on the participant. But, employers are also an important "customer" for STRIDE and are treated as such. Serving both employers and EC residents is one of the most significant aspects the of job linkages strategy.

Table 1: Major Developments in Project STRIDE*

From	To
Program Structure and Content	
♦ 6 week sessions, 6 hours a day, Monday through Wednesday	♦ 4 week sessions, 7½ hours a day Monday through Friday
♦ No stipend for attending training at the beginning of the program	♦ A stipend of $5.00 per day instituted to help attract and retain participants
♦ Participant stipend of $5.00 per day paid for the time attended	♦ Participant stipend paid for the week, only with 100% attendance
♦ The assumption of a job at Hadco at the end of training	♦ Participants "earn" a positive job referral to the employer(s) among the business linkages, staffing services, or other employers that match their interests; program "opens the

From	To
	door," but individuals get jobs on their merits
♦ Training conducted at Keys Community Center only	♦ Tours of employers' facilities
♦ Limited computer training and practice, little integration with other learning	♦ "Open" practice time with more structured instruction and integration; use of curriculum and earned credit from South Mountain Community College
♦ General application and assessment forms "borrowed" from an unrelated program	♦ Customized application and individual survey that provides the information needed for case management specific to STRIDE
♦ Expectation that transportation and child care will be the major barriers to employment	♦ Housing, effects of substance abuse and domestic violence, and mental and physical health issues identified as the most difficult issues for participants
♦ Providing instruction for participants only	♦ Friday morning sessions on community resources open to neighborhood residents
♦ Expecting case management to be the key to overcoming barriers	♦ Experiencing case management as critical, but powerless at times due to inadequate community resources; Focus on developing partnerships to address specific services
♦ Few follow-up activities for participants after graduation	♦ Expecting participants to come back to STRIDE on the Monday after completion for further study

*For additional detail on the program's development, see *Project STRIDE Final Report*, by Soozi Bolte, Keys Community Center, 1999.

From	To
♦ No mechanisms for long-term support	♦ Weekly support groups
♦ Approximately a week in between sessions	♦ Three-week break between sessions for followup and administrative work
♦ Oversight of the program by the Community Jobs Team	♦ Oversight by the Executive Committee; Maintenance of Community Jobs Team and approval of an Employers' Council; Greater staff leadership
♦ Community Jobs Team meetings once per month	♦ Executive Committee (now staff and instructors) meetings once per month; Team meetings once per quarter; employers group to meet twice per year
♦ Executive director and "partners" contracted to provide other instruction but no specific program staff; Program administration by Keys	♦ A full-time case manager; a part-time project coordinator primarily responsible for day-to-day operations; a new executive director who also serves as vice president of operations for Southwest Leadership Foundation
♦ STRIDE as one program at Keys Community Center	♦ Employment as the central function of Keys Community Center
Employment Practices	
♦ Linkage with one manufacturing employer (Hadco)	♦ Linkages with 8 employers in the financial, manufacturing, hospitality, and medical industries and 4 staffing (temporary) services
♦ Emphasis on a job at the manufacturing facility	♦ Emphasis on a "job match" that suits the individual and encourages them to stay at least a year
♦ Emphasis on placement as the program's responsibility with participants having little control over the jobs they get	♦ Emphasis on helping participants to become savvy "consumers" of jobs
♦ Expecting that all participants will stay in the first placement with support	♦ Accepting the need for quick reemployment for some; staffing services as vehicles for trying different jobs while building a stable work history
♦ Seeing full-time employment as the only positive outcome	♦ Broadening options to school and part-time work or full-time education
♦ Perceiving companies as stable and hiring situations as unchanging	♦ Realizing that companies' situations are dynamic; many factors outside the control of the program and the participant affect when a participant begins to work
♦ Limited understanding of the hiring practices among firms and how to work with them	♦ Viewing a trusting relationship between STRIDE and an employer as the best (and often only) way of understanding and breaking into a firm
♦ Communicating the goal of going to work on the Monday after program completion	♦ Understanding that the finalization of specific plans may take some time

Program Inquiries and Participation

During the demonstration, Project STRIDE responded to 213 inquiries about the program. Residents interested in the program attended an orientation session (offered weekly), completed an application and assessment survey, and took the Test of Adult Basic Education before beginning the class. The paths of the inquiries are described in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Program Inquiries and Participation

213 inquiries ➡ 157 educational assessments ➡ 107 started training ➡ 77 graduated ➡ 51 began jobs ➡ 7 more went to more training/education ➡ 19 were not working and still in the area or unknown

Source: *Project STRIDE Final Report*, Keys Community Center, 1999.

Results For Individuals

Training Outcomes

STRIDE and Keys staff and volunteers responded to about two inquiries for each person who began the training. Of these "starters," 72 percent completed the STRIDE class. Three-quarters of these "completers" began jobs or went to school or training. The remainder did not follow through or left the area. As of January 15, 1999, 41 participants who had started jobs were still working in the same or another job or were in training or school. A total of 36 STRIDE completers had quit or been dismissed from their jobs or had not followed through with getting a job. Thus of the 77 STRIDE completers, 53 percent were working or in school by the beginning of 1999; 47 percent had not followed through.

Financial Outcomes

As of January 1999, the wages among all workers ranged from $5.50 to $12.60 per hour with an average of $7.70 per hour. Approximately three-quarters of those working received benefits, including health insurance. According to calculations by the program coordinator, STRIDE participants had earned an estimated total of $304,000 over the course of the demonstration period. This figure was determined by estimating weekly earnings from all those who had worked or were working between January 1998 and January 15, 1999. The figures do not include overtime pay or the value of benefits.

STRIDE's program costs ranged from $2,596 to $4,876 depending on whether figures for completers, placements, or workers as of the close of the program are used. Earnings for completers, placements, and workers at the close of the program spanned from $3,928 to $7,414. Table 2 compares the program's costs with participants' earnings. As would be expected, the longer a person receives services from the program, the higher the costs. It should be noted that the costs and earnings have

been averaged for all program participants, rather than figured specifically for each person. These calculations provide a way of comparing the investment in the program to tangible returns.

Table 2
Costs and Earnings Comparison for Program Participants

Participants	Costs August 1998-December 1998	Estimated Earnings January 1998-January 1999
Completers: Those who finished training	$2,596	$3,948
Placements: Those who began work	$3,920	$5,961
Workers: Those who remain in jobs, school, or training	$4,876	$7,414

Profile of STRIDE's Graduates

Service programs almost always have to recruit more people than the number desired for participation. While more can and should be done to increase the possibilities of success for all of STRIDE's primary customers, attrition is a fact of program life. Participants who have not followed through have been told that they may return to STRIDE at any time. It is hoped that as the reputation for successful program outcomes grows, more former participants will try again.

This profile focuses on STRIDE graduates (training completers) because employers—the second most important STRIDE customer— draw from this pool. Since the program has invested the greatest amount of resources in the completers, most is known about them. As the program progressed, STRIDE's staff began to explore individuals' situations in greater depth to understand what motivated people with similar profiles to make different decisions about their participation.

Women outnumbered men in Project STRIDE; sixty-one percent were female, while 39 percent were male. Sixty-eight percent of the women graduates (19) were single heads of household. A total of 95 percent of graduates were members of racial or ethnic minorities (Figure 2). Seventy percent of the graduates were African-American; nineteen percent were Hispanic. One Native American (1%), four Anglo (5%), and three Asians (4%) also completed the training. Figures 3 and 4 present the ages and educational levels of STRIDE graduates during the pilot period.

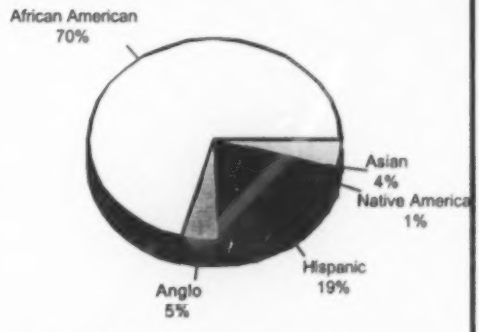

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity of STRIDE Graduates

Among the 77 graduates, 69 had held their last job (and that job may not have been recent) for less than a year. Twenty-one graduates (27%) had criminal records; 14 had experienced both substance abuse and the criminal justice system (18% of graduates and 67% of those with criminal records).

STRIDE continues to serve primarily young African-Americans who live within about two miles of Keys Community Center in an area characterized by gangs, a drug culture, inadequate housing, and persistent poverty. Most have held low-wage jobs intermittently. STRIDE has served some public

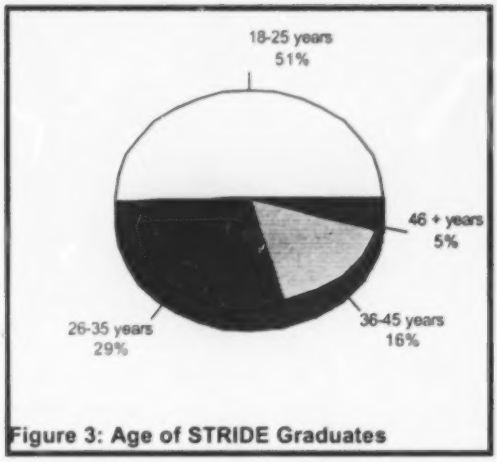

Figure 3: Age of STRIDE Graduates

*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding
Source: Project STRIDE Final Report, Keys Community Center

assistance recipients, but this group has been a minority. However, the STRIDE participants have not necessarily been easier to serve or "better off" than public assistance recipients. The welfare recipients and non-recipients share some characteristics but, according to the staff interviewed, the non-recipients actually have fewer resources and support options than those on welfare.

According to the staff and instructors, everyone enters the program saying they want to work. However, some participants are truly ready to take advantage of the services and some are not. As STRIDE staff commented during various discussions, education is not a predictor of "readiness" or program success. In their experience, work history seemed to be a more reliable indicator of who would stay with the process and who would not. However there were also many exceptions to that rule. In STRIDE's experience, the answer to the question of "Who will be successful?" may lie in the intensity of the barriers each individual faces.

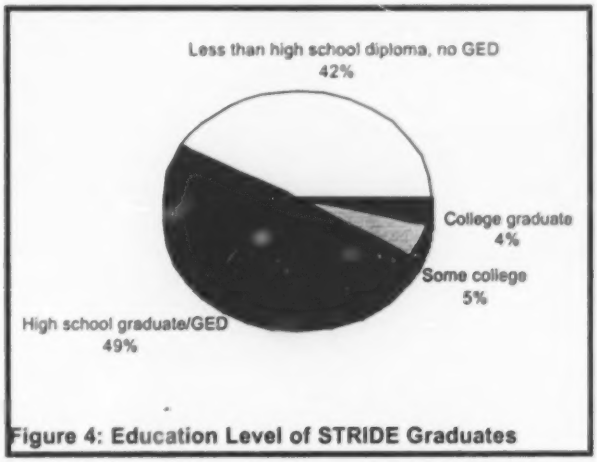

Figure 4: Education Level of STRIDE Graduates

*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding
Source: Project STRIDE Final Report, Keys Community Center

The push to move recipients from welfare to work has renewed interest across the country in employment programs. As welfare recipients are entering the workforce, experience is showing that staying employed and establishing a career are more difficult than starting a job. Recent studies about welfare recipients provide some interesting insights relevant to the experience of STRIDE participants.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc (MPR) published *Employment Experiences of Welfare Recipients Who Find Jobs: Is Targeting Possible?*[1] in 1998.The report described the barriers experienced by welfare recipients and how these affected their ability to continue working. As shown in this and other

[1] *Employment Experiences of Welfare Recipients Who Find Jobs: Is Targeting Possible?* by Anu Rangarajan, Peter Schochet, Dexter Chu, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. August 1998

studies, those who have more problems almost always have a harder time working than those with fewer issues. The seven characteristics identified by MPR as potential barriers are shown below.

Characteristics That May Be Barriers to Employment:
National Sample of Welfare Recipients

- Less than 20 years old
- Lack of a high school diploma or GED
- Low level of basic skills
- Presence of a preschool child
- Absence of another supportive adult in the household
- Lack of a driver's license
- Presence of a health limitation

In the national sample studied, nearly 80 percent of the recipients had at least two of the characteristics, while over 50 percent had at least three.

The characteristics of STRIDE's graduates were compared to MPR's list as much as existing data allowed. STRIDE records did not consistently include the driver's license status or whether there was another supportive adult in the household. Thus, these two characteristics were not used for the STRIDE comparison. The elimination of these two makes the comparison to the MPR list very conservative, since the case management experience shows the other two are quite prevalent. The list of characteristics was then expanded to reflect the observations of STRIDE's case manager and project coordinator. The two lists indicate the significant problems that must be addressed to maintain a job.

Characteristics That May Be Barriers to Employment:
STRIDE Participants

- Less than 20 years old
- Lack of a high school diploma or GED
- Low level of basic skills
- Presence of a preschool child
- Presence of a health limitation (includes mental and physical health, past and present substance abuse, and learning difficulties)
- Criminal record
- Less than 1 year at last job

The table below shows how STRIDE's graduates profiled with respect to the potential barriers identified from the national study and on the expanded local list. "Workers" includes those in jobs, school, or training. "Nonworkers" includes all other graduates. When the characteristics are compared for STRIDE's workers and nonworkers, the effects of the intensity of barriers are clear. The nonworkers tend to have more barriers than those who are working. Among the workers, 71 percent have at least two of the characteristics. Among the non-workers, 89 percent have at least two characteristics. If one looks at those with three or more characteristics, the figures are even more striking. Forty-nine percent of the workers have three barriers or more, while the figure is 81 percent among the nonworkers.

Characteristics Compared Among All STRIDE Completers		
Number of Characteristics	Number of STRIDE Workers	Number of STRIDE Nonworkers
0	6	1
1	6	3
2	9	3
3	13	5
4	5	10
5	1	8
6	1	6
	41 Total	36 Total

This comparison does not take into account the issues such as lack of transportation and housing that make it difficult for participants to be reliable workers. This comparison illustrates the depth of needs among STRIDE participants and the amount of effort programs must devote to case management.

Participants' Outlooks on STRIDE: Feedback from Surveys

Local and media outreach was done at various times, but Project STRIDE depended primarily on "word of mouth" to recruit participants and to build its reputation in the community. As noted by program staff and confirmed by Morrison Institute's followup surveys, participants almost always came to Keys on the strength of a family member's or friend's recommendation. As participants had positive experiences with the program, they began sending other friends and family to the sessions. Also, the word of mouth was strengthened by community members hearing reports of positive experiences and seeing others get jobs.

The positive feelings about Project STRIDE reported in surveys of participants at the end of training were maintained at the 120-day retention mark. The great majority of those interviewed continued to feel that the program had helped them and prepared them well for work. Their suggestions for improving the program generally related to more time with computers and more structured help with educational needs and other problems. However, a few people expressed dissatisfaction with STRIDE because they did not feel that the program delivered what had been promised. In general, this very small group was dissatisfied with the level of jobs available to them. They had expected much more in wages and status without making the changes or learning the skills that would make them successful in the program or in work.

As in the first report, those interviewed most often noted the focus on self-esteem and goal management as program strengths. The participants reported entering STRIDE almost unanimously to get a job or a better job. However in the later interviews and in the graduation ceremonies, completers frequently talked first about the value of the personal development and second about employers and jobs. This situation is in tune with the philosophy of the instructors and staff. As one staff member reflected, "Jobs will always be there. We want them to get a life too."

"We want you to get you a life."—A Team Approach to Change

STRIDE has always depended on a team of instructors to deliver its training. Currently six primary instructors interact with participants throughout the course of the four-week session, and two others provide shorter segments. Some instructors are based at Keys Community Center, while others come from other public and private organizations in the community. The instructors reflect the multi-ethnic background of the participants.

STRIDE's Instructional Partners

- University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service
- Arizona State University Career Outreach
- Integrity Systems, Inc./Hames Enterprises, Inc.
- South Mountain Community College
- Inge Casey Consulting
- Representatives of community organizations

During the demonstration period, the roster of instructors remained quite stable. Only the computer instructor changed. In addition, an instructor with substantial employment and training experience was added, and some changes were made in the facilitation of Managing Goal Achievement. This personal goal-setting and development curriculum, which was developed by a private firm and is used widely in business and public programs, was delivered primarily by a professional facilitator with significant experience with the course. She also headed the program's Executive Committee and was integral to the program's planning and delivery over time. A second facilitator joined her for later program sessions as it became clear that a two-person team was warranted, given the needs of the participants. In addition, Keys staff subsequently attended training to qualify them to facilitate Managing Goal Achievement as well. With their certification, the Keys staff has the capacity to lead this popular part of the program or to continue to supplement the consultants' work. Also, with more people trained, concepts can be reinforced or activities continued by a variety of those involved in STRIDE.

Representatives of community organizations and businesses also frequently made presentations to the STRIDE classes or led tours of workplaces. In addition, the staffing services did interviews and some testing at Keys Community Center. Tours of employers' facilities and presentations by business representatives reportedly affected participants in several important ways. First, they experienced for themselves the culture and "feel" of a business. More importantly, they began to change negative attitudes about businesses. One instructor reported hearing participants say that they "didn't know there were any good companies."

In a group interview at the close of the demonstration period, the instructors and STRIDE staff discussed their outlooks on and lessons from the program. As they gained experience with the clientele, the instructors and STRIDE staff worked together to match the training more closely to participants' needs. For example they:

- Picked up the pace of instruction and reduced the time for some topics to allow expanding the time for others
- Made the training more flexible to meet each group's needs
- Included more real-life examples
- Increased interaction among participants by using small group activities and other techniques
- Expanded computer training and open practice time
- Added time management instruction

- Stressed continuing at Keys until participants started to work
- Began to integrate the computer training with instruction in other areas.

The primary instructors and staff members viewed themselves as a team and felt positive about their work together and their contributions to STRIDE. During the interview, they related how they uncovered their similar personal values and perspectives on the participants. The group's major goal for the participants is that they create successful, complete lives for themselves. They viewed "getting a job" as easier for the neighborhood's residents than overcoming the effects of "lives of loss." As those interviewed defined it, a complete life includes a meaningful career and much more. One instructor spoke for the group when she said that "my goal is for them to get it." "It" is motivation, self-esteem, and skills that will last a lifetime.

The instructors' and staff's common values and outlooks reportedly helped them to work together and to make decisions about issues that cut across all areas of instruction. In their experience, the team approach also allowed the instructors to learn from one another, and it broadened the range of viewpoints and experiences to which participants were exposed. The leaders' various experiences with participants provided valuable input into job referrals and case management.

From an administrative perspective, the combination of instructors was perceived to have reduced the overall cost of the program. Contract workers and instructors (for example, computer training and Managing Goal Achievement) and existing resources, such as courses from the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service, allowed Keys Community Center to deliver a wide-ranging training course without hiring many full-time employees.

Emphases on Both a Supportive Group and Individual Progress

The instructors brought a great deal of program experience and neighborhood knowledge to STRIDE. They also brought a healthy dose of skepticism to the program because in the past they had seen many good ideas be implemented poorly. STRIDE turned out to be a pleasant surprise for them. According to the group, STRIDE's mission and goals were being met, and the program was doing what they and other planners intended it to do.

The focus on building a cohesive group for support and learning and the employer relationships were mentioned as two differences between STRIDE and other programs with which people had prior experience. Efforts were made to forge strong bonds among the participants and between the students and the instructors and to maintain a supportive, positive atmosphere. A nurturing, respectful environment and support systems that extended outside of the program reportedly resulted from the instructors' and staff's approach. According to those interviewed, most participants had rarely experienced this type of learning atmosphere and certainly did not expect it in a jobs program. The group also gave participants experience with working in teams which included men and women from a variety of backgrounds. The instructors reported that their diversity was also a positive factor in the program. Instructors of color became role models who motivated participants to think about new possibilities for themselves.

Relationships turned out to be powerful motivators for participants to do well during the classes. Because of their strong connections with STRIDE's leadership, participants reportedly did not want to disappoint the staff and instructors during the four-week session. However, the staff and instructors learned that not wanting to disappoint could also prevent people from coming back to the program if things were not going well for them after the training. Participants with positive news or stable situations tended to come in for additional help or simply to stay in touch, while those who were not faring as well stayed away.

Further Program Development

The instructors recommended the following enhancements for STRIDE.

- Determine how to do more to address the neighborhood's "give me" entitlement mentality.
- Address the area's drug culture and look for ways to put the entrepreneurial aspects of street life to productive use.
- Create more opportunities for short-term successes to confirm that planning does make a difference and to maintain participants' interest.
- Work with others in the community to communicate to employers that participants have promise and potential.
- Develop more "stopgap" activities for participants before they enter jobs.
- Create internships and other opportunities for participants which can compensate for a lack of work history and skills or allow residents and employers to come together on a trial basis.
- Get publicity to show "regular" people from a tough area succeeding in the workforce.
- Organize the community to address the problems that affect employment success, such as housing and mental health issues.

A Tough Challenge

The group cited Managing Goal Achievement as the most important part of STRIDE. However, they also saw a need to reinforce and extend the personal development after the STRIDE training. Attracting people back to Keys for personal and educational development was identified as one of the program's biggest challenges.[2] Another challenge is working more effectively with the men in the classes. In general, the male participants do well in the class, but reportedly have had a harder time transitioning into the labor force or maintaining a job. Two explanations given for these difficulties were boredom on the job because of a poor match, or dissatisfaction with an impersonal atmosphere after STRIDE's nurturing approach.

Results For Keys Community Center

Based on the interviews and observations done for this report, the STRIDE experience appears to have positive for Keys Community Center. For example, the project appeared to:

- Offer the organization new opportunities for service and growth
- Create new networks for the center
- Refocus the agency's mission on employment
- Begin to establish an organizational environment that values experimentation and innovation.

During the demonstration, Keys Community Center appeared to change from a seemingly staid agency to one with momentum. As mentioned earlier, the combination of a lack of experience with employment programs, lagging performance at the beginning of 1998, and new staff members created the environment for Keys to reach out for information and assistance. STRIDE staff members took advantage of a variety of sources of assistance. Two important examples were the City of Phoenix Workforce Development Division and Morrison Institute for Public Policy. STRIDE staff members used these resources for learning about employment issues and other programs and as a sounding board.

Like many other nonprofit organizations, monetary support for Keys is a constant struggle. STRIDE's ability to document a financial return for the program in terms of wages reportedly has reframed perceptions of the agency's work among some community leaders and others close to the organization. Data that highlight employment services as a sound financial investment have, as one person put it, given the organization new credibility and new ways to communicate the importance of this often difficult and labor-intensive work.

Keys and STRIDE became almost synonymous during the demonstration program. In fact, some of those interviewed reported that Keys has been reorganized around STRIDE and jobs. One person described Keys before STRIDE as a place where people came to get away from the area's problems,

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[2] At the time of this report, several participants had agreed to start a STRIDE newsletter. The staff also had plans to start weekly support groups that would feature a followup to Managing Goal Achievement. Their hope in having weekly meetings was that working and nonworking participants alike would attend once a month.

but the center could do little more than provide a temporary haven. Now Keys has networks that can link people with the world beyond the neighborhood. Community feedback, according to those interviewed, has been largely positive. Some church leaders, for example, reportedly have felt that they now have a place to refer parishioners who need employment assistance. Several of the interviewees noted increased "traffic" of all kinds at Keys, including organizational representatives who could be problem-solving partners. However, STRIDE is not without critics. Those interviewed described some community members as feeling that the program has not delivered on high-paying jobs as anticipated.

Southwest Leadership Foundation and Keys Community Center have committed to maintaining the program at the conclusion of the City of Phoenix funding. Keys anticipates serving about 120 people in 1999. The program's leaders are also considering how to add more health services, recruit more employers, formalize some cooperative arrangements, and expand child care options at Keys. At the time of this report, a variety of funding initiatives were under consideration.

Keys Community Center had very limited experience with the performance payment system used in the STRIDE demonstration. The technique of paying set sums per person at set points, such as the end of training and 120 days after placement, was reported to be difficult administratively for Keys. For example, the system reportedly was perceived to focus the project's leaders on "numbers" rather than individuals' needs. Also, the uneven flow of revenue made it appear to some in Southwest Leadership Foundation that the project was not paying its way, despite the nearly $200,000 budget. The payment system was characterized as "unnecessarily stressful."

Some changes in funding and management processes were suggested for the City of Phoenix, including:

- Ask for more concrete match for public funds. Public funders should help programs to leverage dollars.
- Allow program funding to be spread over more than one year.
- Help programs to learn from each other's experiences.
- Work with employers and STRIDE to better meet the needs of new workers and to motivate private investments in areas, such as transportation, which are chronic problems.
- Motivate city departments to better integrate systems (for example job training and Head Start) to help residents find assistance quickly and easily and to reduce potential competition or confusion among programs.

The STRIDE experience, according to some interviewed, has taken some of the "mystery" out of local businesses. There is a better understanding now of the dynamic, competitive environment businesses are coping with, as well as the particular cultures of firms. The various relationships have shown the differences among companies' hiring practices and standards and underscored the myriad factors that affect who is hired, and when. This new knowledge was described as "frustrating" to the extent that businesses are perceived as unwilling to help with the community's problems or too narrow in their outlook on contributing to the community. Many businesses are viewed by some of those interviewed as seeing their role in programs of this type as simply providing jobs to neighborhood residents, and thus are not players in addressing even more challenging community problems. However, some of the interviewees predicted that situation will change as relationships deepen and become increasingly productive.

Community Jobs Team

Since Keys is one part of Southwest Leadership Foundation, it does not have a separate board of directors. The organization has had an advisory board, but it was not visibly active in Project STRIDE. The Community Jobs Team was organized along a board of directors model. The active participants of the Community Jobs Team changed somewhat over the course of the demonstration. More employers became involved, such as B.F. Goodrich and the Volt staffing service, as did community organizations such as Wesley Community Center. Clergy members became less involved. The instructors and Keys staff continued to take part in the group. Community Jobs Team members frequently attended the graduation ceremonies held at the conclusion of each session. These activities provided first-hand knowledge of the participants that team members described as more meaningful than data on "the program."

Some team members participated in two planning sessions which were held in September 1998 to discuss the future of STRIDE and the Community Jobs Team. Led by a facilitator from the City of Phoenix Human Resources Department, the sessions reviewed the team's mission and accomplishments and crafted a new organizational structure and priorities for the future. A decision was made to initiate an employers council which would meet twice per year. In this group, business representatives can discuss the issues of greatest concern to them. The community groups will continue to work together to guide and develop the program.

The Team Perspective

A group interview with the Community Jobs Team was held in February 1999 at one of the team's regular meetings. However since most of the people at the meeting had not been involved in the team for the entire demonstration period, the discussion was limited.

In general, those interviewed perceived the team as a promising concept for which the secret to effectiveness had not yet been found. The perception lingered that Keys Community Center alone was responsible for the program. The main issues for the team's well-intentioned members included:

- Busy schedules that did not easily include another monthly meeting
- Uneven bases of knowledge about the program and how to address its needs
- Uneven bases of knowledge about community issues
- Overwhelming complexity of the effort
- Greater expectations for the team than were feasible.

STRIDE's leaders continued to acknowledge the value of the team and partnerships to address specific issues and to bring additional resources to Keys. But, they reportedly still must find effective ways of doing so. They voiced a desire to help community members and employers to contribute to the effort without coming to monthly meetings. Some mentioned that the team may need to identify one issue to work on as a group, rather than try to oversee an entire program. The heart of the issue is that the STRIDE experience showed that management of a program is not realistic for a group such as the Community Jobs Team. It was suggested that the group expand the community representation and engage people in addressing specific problems in the area that affect employment. One example of this

"project" approach is Phoenix Memorial Hospital's work with Keys to offer a health fair for the community in the spring of 1999.

Results For The Community

The major results for individuals and Keys Community Center include a renewed community organization, a viable "first step" employment program, and real financial returns. But there are two other important community outcomes that warrant attention. Because of the barriers participants face and the inadequacy of some community services, STRIDE appears to have acted as a catalyst for the creation of a community development agenda in support of employment. What in the past would have been viewed as "nice to do" or social services for their own sake are now perceived as concrete steps toward getting as many people to work as possible. Changes in the community may now be related to supporting employment and keeping new workers in the neighborhood. In addition, Keys Community Center and STRIDE now have lessons to offer to other start-up employment efforts such as the welfare-to-work program called Project EARN. The interviews conducted for this report reflected an expanding network of employment service providers.

Discussion And Findings

Notable Revivals

Based on the data compiled over the demonstration period, Keys Community Center and its partners have created a significant job linkages program in one of the Enterprise Community's most distressed neighborhoods. Their efforts resulted in notable revivals for some EC residents and for Keys Community Center. If the positive developments can be sustained and enhanced over time, STRIDE will be playing an important role in the revival of the entire neighborhood. STRIDE offers a viable model of small-scale, local employment services to other areas of the City of Phoenix.

Could a program that has created new opportunity in one Enterprise Community neighborhood be duplicated elsewhere? Could the STRIDE model contribute to another locale or be implemented on a larger scale? The answer to both questions is yes. The components of the program can be replicated. The key elements are the understanding of local employers, the use of temporary services, strong case management, quality staff and instruction, and continuous learning and improvement.

STRIDE developed into a focused employability and personal development program with many of the characteristics of other strong job initiatives. The program's leaders compiled a convincing record, especially considering the agency's steep learning curve and rocky beginning. STRIDE continues to be on the right track with EC residents in terms of approach, training, and job attainment, and to have potential for broader and deeper assistance to residents. The organization's work has actually created a new community asset. However, as will be discussed below, STRIDE still faces some substantial challenges. Whether STRIDE is the first of many productive employment initiatives or a "one-year

wonder" will depend on the vision and actions of the leaders of Keys Community Center and Southwest Leadership Foundation.

STRIDE's Components

- Individual services and support
- Self-esteem and personal goals
- Employability skills
- Career exploration and job matching
- Personal responsibility
- Case management
- Access to services and jobs
- Employer connections
- Follow up

Reconfirming the Characteristics of Success

"Successful employment programs…offer a wide range of individualized services; have a central focus on employment; have close ties to local employers; and are intensive, setting high expectations for participation."[3] At the close of the demonstration period, Project STRIDE's structure and content are similar to some other employability programs in Arizona and across the country. Its combination of components is fairly common. STRIDE has reconfirmed that this mix, especially the employer relationships, works in the short term for residents with little experience and few skills. Two of Keys Community Center's notable achievements are making this type of first step program available in a neighborhood that had not had one previously, and establishing the service agency as a viable liaison between residents and local employers. These two outcomes provide a strong foundation on which to expand and improve STRIDE and build related programs. Additional lessons from the program are presented below.

Lessons From Project STRIDE

- Strong relationships with a finite number of employers in various fields offer participants a range of options and the staff a manageable workload. Hires result from positive relationships with employers, solid training, and strong case management.
- Place-oriented employment services work for neighborhoods. But, matching jobs and interests is as important as connecting "local people with local jobs." The choice of employment is critical to the individual's success. Thus, a variety of employer relationships is necessary.
- Positive relationships with temporary services provide valuable routes to many types of jobs. Staffing companies allow participants to try different jobs and build a work history. They may also provide the only access to long-term quality jobs with some important employers.
- STRIDE participants benefitted from the program's combination of skills, learning, and support. The group experience is an important factor in preparing for the realities of the work place. Focusing on the combination is more effective than providing one without the others.
- Program and staff development must focus on knowledge in four areas: the economy and employers; the best adult education/learning techniques; organizational, human resources, and career development; collaborative community problem solving.

The Way Things Are

[3] *Strategies to Promote Education, Skill Development, and Career Advancement Opportunities for Low-Skilled Workers*, National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices, 1998. Quoting from *Beyond Job Search or Basic Education: Rethinking the Role of Skills in Welfare Reform* by Julie Strawn, Center for Law and Social Policy.

Nearly everyone interested in reviving communities understands the connection between work and revitalization. Because of the immense importance of this relationship, the hard realities of helping disadvantaged people onto rewarding career paths are rarely acknowledged. Employment programs are expected to turn out successful, stable workers in short periods of time without the ups and downs that even the most advantaged people experience in their work lives. High expectations are undeniably an important ingredient for success in employment programs, and people, like some in STRIDE, often do succeed in the labor force quickly. However, policy makers and funding organizations traditionally may have expected too much too quickly from too many people. Personal choices and many types of life circumstances will always affect employment. Realistically, some people will become successful workers immediately and some will drop in and out for a time. New workers often will have to experiment to get a sense of the world of work. Within this context, programs such as STRIDE can better understand participants' actions and design services that minimize the process of trial and error.

Supporting the Next Steps

"Word-of-mouth" is leading many residents to Project STRIDE. Predictably, STRIDE has learned that some recruits simply want to "use" the program and others are not ready to do what is necessary to be successful workers. Still the program must be concerned about those who complete the training but do not go on to work or those who quit jobs quickly. The training certainly has a value on its own, and, as a community center, Keys wants to remain as flexible and open as possible. However, the investments made in training completers and the reputation staked on every job referral are significant. As businesses have learned, it is easier to keep a customer than to find a new one. One challenge for STRIDE with respect to people who complete training but do not take the next steps is to determine how to either retain them or bring them back for additional assistance. "Stopgap" measures such as internships have been mentioned as a method of "trial employment." These types of activities may be a viable way of keeping someone who needs additional preparation or experience involved with the program and Keys.

STRIDE's Greatest Challenges for Individuals

- Consider how better to either retain those who do not follow through after training or bring them back for additional assistance.
- Help participants continue to upgrade skills in spite of the difficulties of entry level jobs and continuing barriers.
- Create the partnerships and networks necessary to address difficult barriers.
- Invest in the information, training, and learning resources to make the organization part of the networks of desirable EC companies.
- Locate more EC companies that will be feasible employers for the target audience and develop relationships with them.
- Retain staff and hire more as necessary to deal with an increasing client load.

Recent studies by MPR and the National Governors Association (NGA) focus on the reality of short-term jobs among disadvantaged workers. Their work suggests that "false starts" like those experienced by a sizable percentage of STRIDE's participants are inevitable. MPR reported, "The first four to six months after job start is a critical period during

which many people stop working."[4] Interviews with STRIDE staff members underscored this finding. For a variety of reasons, at about four to six months after starting work, people who had previously appeared to be secure often began to have problems. The day-to-day realities of work had set in by this time. Perhaps the person had become bored with the job. While most programs concentrate on beginning jobs, the critical points in a person's worklife—and effective methods for encouraging job retention when they are reached—must be recognized and created. This is in addition to keeping up with basic supports like child care, transportation, and personal support. For those who begin to build a work history, additional training and education are usually necessary to move on to better jobs. One of the greatest challenges facing STRIDE is to help participants continue to upgrade skills, despite the difficulties of entry level jobs and the barriers they continue to face.

Recent research reports and STRIDE's experience have suggested some strategies for skill development. NGA compiled recommendations from several studies on low-wage workers. One study indicated that three school-to-work techniques are particularly relevant for low-skilled workers. These are: mentoring; contextual learning, which uses job experiences to teach technical/academic skills or information; and credentialing, which identifies specific skills and knowledge gained through work experience and provides employees with a professional certificate of completion.[5] The report counseled, "To produce meaningful and lasting effects, efforts to link education with work for low-skilled workers should be coordinated with the needs and efforts of the local employers who hire these workers."

STRIDE's new support groups are intended to create peer mentoring relationships over time. The other two techniques offer options that could be pursued with South Mountain Community College and with the employers. Another choice is—within the job match context—to guide participants to employers with the best internal education and training systems. STRIDE participants may fare better at larger or more training-oriented EC firms because of the opportunities they make available to employees. STRIDE's cultivation of relationships with Sprint and Bank of America makes sense from this perspective. This understanding provides valuable guidance on which additional employers to include in the program's network. In addition, the ideas underscore the point that much more must be done to provide bridges between participants and jobs and to systematically develop STRIDE's own training.

Another aspect of retaining training completers has been identified by the Prevention Center at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. This center has designed and tested an employability program aimed at preventing depression and other undesirable mental health effects of unemployment. Project STRIDE and the Michigan program both feature support and job seeking skills. The psychology researchers also include an "inoculation against setbacks" in their training. Specific techniques prepare participants to handle the problems that inevitably arise at home and in the workplace. STRIDE's staff had recognized the need for this program component, and they are currently communicating with the Michigan center on ways to apply their expertise to STRIDE. This is an example of the type of program development necessary to keep completers involved.

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[4] Rangarajan, Anue, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

[5] *Strategies to Promote Education, Skill Development, and Career Advancement Opportunities for Low-Skilled Workers*, National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices, 1998.

STRIDE has refocused Keys Community Center on employment. This positive step should be the first of many for the center so that it becomes a leader in employment services for local residents. To achieve that goal, STRIDE's basic training must become increasingly sophisticated in terms of the economy, learning, and skills, while maintaining the personal support. The undesirable alternative is simply to be a place that can only attempt to help people with jobs. Without a thoughtful plan for the agency, extensive knowledge among staff members, and strong relationships with employers and the community, residents may be left behind to their detriment and that of the neighborhood STRIDE was designed to serve.

Tackling the Toughest Problems

As discussed earlier, intensity of barriers affects outcomes for individuals. The more barriers a person faces, the less likely he or she is to succeed in the labor force quickly. Also, some barriers are more difficult to deal with than others. For example, state and federal statutes bar people with various types of criminal records from many positions. Although little can be done for this situation besides seeking out sympathetic employers and preparing the participants to be straightforward about their pasts, other issues could be addressed by STRIDE and other community entities.

Mental health services and housing surfaced as particularly needed, but practically nonexistent, assistance for the STRIDE clientele. Partnerships with existing providers or new coalitions could begin to address these issues. Also, more familiarity with the bureaucracies that affect participants, such as JOBS, DES child care, and AHCCCS, might open doors to more resources for EC residents. STRIDE will need to create the partnerships and public and private networks necessary to begin to solve what appear to be the toughest issues.

The Reality of Competition

Participants must get and keep jobs on their own, but STRIDE opens doors and vouches for these "high risk" employees. STRIDE has realized that learning about the cultures and standards of the various employers is critical to a productive relationship. The program has created linkages with approximately eight employers and wants to expand that number to about 12 in the Enterprise Community. Changes brought about by a business merger, and the realization that not everyone is suited to manufacturing work, motivated the development of a broader network of employers. Connections with a variety of employers have met the specific interests of participants and provided a broad overview of the world of work. The variety also insulates STRIDE somewhat from the ups and downs experienced by their business partners.

Another challenge for the future, however, is to identify and develop relationships with more EC companies that are quality employers for the target audience. This labor-intensive activity demands a different type of thinking than many community-based organizations are currently accustomed to. Community organizations must combine caring with an understanding of companies, the economy, and competitiveness. Because of competitive pressures and rapid changes in jobs and skill requirements, today's employment programs must learn continually about their target area's economy (and its connections to the rest of the region), its firms, and their needs and concerns. If, as one workforce

expert explains, the program is to prosper, they must "enter the trusted network of recruiters."[6] Another significant challenge for STRIDE is to invest in activities that will make the organization part of the networks of as many desirable EC companies as possible.

Despite the challenges, the vibrant Phoenix economy still makes this is a good time for STRIDE and the job linkages concept. Unfortunately though, employers have many choices for help with employees. In addition, firms often believe that they have limited capacity to absorb many high risk people. Even with the closest connections and best intentions, the employers start out with the best cards in the job game, and will initially dictate the conditions of relationships. Only after a relationship has proven to be effective will businesses consider looking beyond their primary interests. A natural tension exists between programs and businesses because of the different purposes for their actions. Serving the business well appears to be the only way to move beyond it.

Career development in today's economy is likely to happen by "chaining" jobs together in a group of related firms. Thus, another way of maintaining long-term relationships with participants is to identify and cultivate more firms in certain fields. Since finding job leads is one of the most difficult employment tasks, a known network of businesses may be a powerful reason for participants to remain close to STRIDE. This situation may also allow Keys to develop programs over time that serve specific industries in the EC.

People Still Make the Most Difference

The STRIDE staff and instructors comprise a strong team. The participants' feedback emphasizes, as countless other evaluations have, that quality staff are a primary reason for quality outcomes. Another challenge for STRIDE is to set an example as an employer, and reward, advance, and retain its staff members. To attain the vision of employment as "the heart of community" voiced in the previous project report, STRIDE requires staff members who will serve residents and employers and the community. A continuing challenge will be to retain experienced staff and to hire additional people to deal with an increasing client load.

The Center and the Community

If Keys Community Center were an underperforming company, the people connected with STRIDE would be the turnaround specialists. Now the organization must look at how to sustain STRIDE and develop the continuum of employment services desired for the area. The greatest challenges for the center are to build its capacity to meet the challenges cited for individuals, and to refine the collaborative skills that will bring more resources to Keys and the community.

Challenges for Keys Community Center

- Find additional ways of using community and employer expertise.
- Build the center's capacity to meet the challenges identified for individuals and others.
- Refine collaborative skills.
- Act on the community development agenda in concert

[6] *Workforce Development Networks* by Bennett Harrison and Marcus Weiss, Sage Publications, 1998.

The Community Jobs Team was created essentially on a board of directors model. As indicated earlier, this structure has not been as effective as anticipated. The team concept, based on the responses in interviews, remains critical to long-term success, but the best way for it to work must still be found. The challenge is to find ways of using community and employer expertise in effective ways. Involvement in discrete projects or in one issue at a time appears to be one promising strategy.

Job linkages was just one part of an overall strategy for revitalization in the Enterprise Community. These types of programs need to be involved in broader community development to ensure that employment increases enough to bring about other positive changes and that new workers remain in the community. If a "community support network for employment" is one of the goals of job linkages, a community development agenda is one of the primary means to achieve it. The greatest challenge now is to act on this employment-related agenda in concert with the overall plans for the organization and other neighborhood efforts.

Lessons from the National Citizen Participation Development Project offer some insights for Keys and Southwest Leadership Foundation as the organizations look to the future. In a report on resident activism in ten cities with strong "participation systems," researchers found citizens to be central to issues of housing, transportation, environmental protection, community development, budgets, and long-range planning. The results of their work "underscore the point that effective participation of the poor is a difficult task: extensive, continuous outreach is needed if any participation effort is to achieve a reasonable cross-section of the community."[7] But, as they also noted, "People really solve community problems."

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in light of the challenges listed in previous sections. They are intended to ensure that STRIDE and Keys Community Center have the capacity and resources to continue their work of community revival.

- Develop a vision and plan for Keys Community Center and STRIDE that includes the activities identified by the Community Jobs Team and focuses on related developmental activities for the program, individuals, and the community.
- Invest in staff development and cross-training so that employees and contractors are aware of the connections among adult education, economic, organizational, and career development information and can apply "lessons" from other fields to STRIDE and future employment programs.
- Continue technical assistance from practitioners and experts in training and development, program development, collaboration, and related fields.
- Continue to increase the ability of the organization to respond individuals' and community needs on its own and in conjunction with other public and private organizations.
- Institute a long-term followup system for STRIDE completers.
- Increase the number of staff members to allow for a growing caseload and the program's continuing development.

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[7] *Kernels of Democracy*, Ken Thomson, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Kent E. Portney, Lincoln Filene Center, Tufts University, 1994.

Like many other employment programs, Project STRIDE is run day-to-day to help participants master the skills they need to succeed in real businesses. But unlike most others, STRIDE sometimes goes beyond the tangible things new workers need to know. Nowhere is the project's spiritual dimension more on display than at the ceremonies that conclude the four-week sessions. These joyous occasions can draw as many as 100 guests. STRIDE completers often report that the program is the first thing they have ever finished. So—dressed, polished, and proud—they introduce the children, friends, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, spouses, and others who have come to witness their success. One at a time, the graduates come up to the small one-step stage to receive certificates from the program's leaders and have an official picture taken. Then each one comes back to the podium alone to tell the audience what STRIDE has meant to them. Nearly everyone expresses their gratitude to STRIDE's instructors and staff for their help and understanding. Some tell how they have learned to set goals or about their new jobs. Others draw vivid before and after portraits of themselves. Many thank God for bringing them to this caring place. The responses to these occasionally funny, always touching, testimonials make one appreciate the faith that is fundamental to this community. Some of the speakers will make it immediately. Some will keep struggling. But they will all remember the event's sense and spirit of revival.

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